

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) Method of pre-heating a pot [(1)] provided with anodes (10) and cathodes [(5)] for the production of aluminium by electrolysis, said method including a first step, prior to the pot being supplied with current, during which a layer of a granular conductive material (25) is deposited and then crushed between the anodes and the cathodes, characterised in that the granular conductive material is graphite-based and in that the layer of granular conductive material (25) only extends, after crushing, over a part of the lower surface (14) of each anode (10) and takes the form of contact blocks (13).
2. (currently amended) Method according to claim 1, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the layer of granular conductive material (25) covers, after crushing, ~~between from 5 and to 40%~~ of the lower surface (14) of each anode (10).
3. (currently amended) Method according to claim 2, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the layer of granular conductive material (25) covers, after crushing, ~~between from 5 and to 20%~~ of the lower surface (14) of each anode (10).
4. (currently amended) Method according to ~~any one of~~ claim[[s]] 1 to 3, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the number of contact blocks (13) associated with each anode (10) is ~~between from 3 and to 20~~.
5. (currently amended) Method according to ~~any one of~~ claim[[s]] 1 to 4, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the contact blocks (13) have, in cross-section, a general circular or oval shape.
6. (currently amended) Method according to ~~any one of~~ claim[[s]] 1 to 5, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ each contact block (13) has an initial thickness of ~~between from 0.5 and to 4 cm.~~

7. (currently amended) Method according to ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1 to 6, characterised in that wherein~~ the contact blocks (13) are made using a template (15) placed on the cathodes [[(5)]] and including a plate (16) fitted with several orifices (17) into each of which granular conductive material (25) is inserted.
8. (currently amended) Method according to ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1 to 7, characterised in that wherein~~ 90 to 95% of the graphite grains of the granular conductive material (25) are ~~between from 1 and to 8 mm in size.~~
9. (currently amended) Method according to ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1 to 8, characterised in that wherein~~ the granular conductive material (25) additionally includes at least one other material that is able to vary its resistivity.
10. (currently amended) Method of pre-heating a pot, according to ~~one of claim[[s]] 1 to 9, characterised in that it includes the following steps wherein said method comprises:~~
 - forming a layer of the granular conductive material over a part of the surface of a cathode,
 - laying each anode on the layer of granular material,
 - establishing an electrical connection between the stem of each anode and the anode frame,
 - energizing the pot so as to cause an electric current to flow between the cathodes and the anodes.
11. (currently amended) Method according to ~~any one of claim[[s]] 1 to 10, characterised in that wherein~~ two or more contact blocks (13) have a cross-section of different sizes.

Please insert the following new claims:

12. (new) Method according to claim 2, wherein the contact blocks have, in cross-section, a general circular or oval shape.
13. (new) Method according to claim 2, wherein each contact block has an initial thickness of from 0.5 to 4 cm.

14. (new) Method according to claim 5, wherein each contact block has an initial thickness of from 0.5 to 4 cm.
15. (new) Method according to claim 2, wherein the contact blocks are made using a template placed on the cathodes and including a plate fitted with several orifices into each of which granular conductive material is inserted.
16. (new) Method according to claim 5, wherein the contact blocks are made using a template placed on the cathodes and including a plate fitted with several orifices into each of which granular conductive material is inserted.
17. (new) Method according to claim 2, wherein 90 to 95% of the graphite grains of the granular conductive material are from 1 to 8 mm in size.
18. (new) Method according to claim 5, wherein 90 to 95% of the graphite grains of the granular conductive material are from 1 to 8 mm in size.
19. (new) Method according to claim 2, wherein the granular conductive material additionally includes at least one other material that is able to vary its resistivity.
20. (new) Method of pre-heating a pot, according to claim 2, wherein said method comprises:
 - forming a layer of the granular conductive material over a part of the surface of a cathode,
 - laying each anode on the layer of granular material,
 - establishing an electrical connection between the stem of each anode and the anode frame,
 - energizing the pot so as to cause an electric current to flow between the cathodes and the anodes.